

I Don't Want to Talk About It

by muggleborn.dragon.ryder

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Summary: We all have that taboo subject. That 'I don't want to talk about it'. Well, for some people, it's way more complicated than that. Big four fic, featuring Jack from Rise of the Guardians and Rapunzel from Tangled. Rated T for future chapters. Eventual Rapunzel/Flynn and Hiccup/Astrid

1. Chapter 1

****I Don't Want to Talk About It ****

****A/N:** My newest story! :D and it's a Big Four fic, too, wow :D I've never written this fandom before, unless you count a misguided attempt back in December ;-; but I think I've grown as a writer and I think I'm finally ready :D updates will be sporadic, I'm finishing off the To Be Loved the Way You Love Me trilogy at the moment, so...**

****Oh,** and the next chapter will be in Hiccup's POV :D the name in bold at the top indicates whose POV it's in :D **

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><p>- Merida â€"

"Merida!"

My own name hits my ears with more force than a punch. I jump about a foot in the air, looking around for the source before remembering the paper in my hand. That sounded like Punzie's voice, and if she ever found outâ€¦ I tear the paper in two as quick as I can, swinging one leg over Angus' broad back so I can pretend that he was just tired this whole time.

"We've got to stick together," Punzie comes swinging into view, her strangely long, thick golden hair suspending her between two trees.

She's glaring at me, but it's light, and I can tell that she prefers not to scold. "I don't like this forest, and I don't like the idea of you getting lost in it, especially when you're alone."

I drop my eyes to Angus' mane. "He's tired." But that's not the truth. If she was paying attention, she would be able to tell from the way my hands are shaking. But Rapunzel is not paying attention, not at this moment; she's busy being annoyed that I fell behind, as per usual. Really, everybody keeps telling me that I should just ride on Toothless with Hiccup, or let Rapunzel's hair carry me from tree to tree, but I'm scared that Angus will run off without me. And the only place he knows besides by my side is home, and if he went home without meâ€¦

The words flash in front of my eyes again: _"Her family is desperate for news". _

Desperate. Right. Yeah. Like I'll ever believe that.

"You keep holding us up like this, and I'll make Jack walk with you to keep you in line," Punzie continues.

My jaw drops and for a second, the poster is forgotten as I glare up at her. "You wouldn't!"

"No," she confesses, "I wouldn't, but you should have seen your face. Keep up, Merida!"

I urge Angus into a slightly faster trot as she swings away from me, her blonde hair catching the last few rays of the setting sun and gleaming momentarily gold. I study his brown fur with all those little white patches mixed in, this horse I've loved since I was a little girl, and I start wondering what they would say if he turned up without me. Would they actually be scared for my safety? My dad, maybe. Maybe even my brothers. But herâ€¦she wouldn't be. Why would she ever be? She's probably glad that I'm gone.

The thought saddens me, but it stiffens my resolve. This is what needs to be done. Stillâ€¦ I throw a slightly guilty glance at the shredded paper in the grass behind me.

"Merida," my name floats back to me in the cool autumn air again as Punzie reappears. "Please keep up, really, you scared Jack half to death when he couldn't see you from the sky."

I glare up at the distant blue speck for a second; I don't have the best vision, but I'm imagining that he looks almost sheepish. I lower my gaze back to Punzie as she continues. "We're looking for a nice place to sleep, and I think we may have found it."

"Already?" I ask, surprised, following her blindly as she leads me to the spot they chose. I normally voice my opinion on where we should set up camp, but today I guess I was just too shaken to even remember it.

"Yeah, it's pretty much shielded from the cold, soâ€¦"

"Which reminds me," I jump off Angus, pushing the poster out of my mind for good. "Come down here, Frost!"

"Oh, Merida, no," Rapunzel pleads. "Can't we just have a quiet night without you two?"

"Yes, Princess?"

The title makes me flinch, but he's been calling me that ever since he met me; I guess a part of me still panics upon hearing it. "Don't call me that," I snap, just like I have every other time, glaring up into those amused blue eyes. "In case you haven't noticed, Snowflake, none of us can really afford to catch frostbite right now."

He runs his fingers through his hair, leaning against the tree trunk. "Lay off, Mer," he calls. "I'm being careful. Nobody's gotten too cold yet, right, Punzie? Right, Hicc?"

"Lsggreacemteouths." At least, I think that's what Hiccup said as Toothless flew down and he tumbled off the dragon, leaning against the scaly black side. "Sleep."

Normally, Jack would be jumping all over him to find out what he said and win the argument, but today, he lets the other boy be. Hiccup took watch all night last night, and he didn't sleep at all today; it's understandable to all of us why he's so tired. Toothless lights a fire for the rest of us, creating a small crater in the ground and then curls up next to his rider, cooing and nuzzling him to keep him warm, but Hiccup is already pretty much asleep, just shivering lightly.

Jack looks the slightest bit guilty at this, and stays as far from the fire and its crackling warmth as he can get. I sink down next to the fire with a sigh, spreading my hands gratefully out towards the flames. "Thank you, Toothless," I whisper to the dragon. The creature's green eyes pop open for a second and he croons deep in his throat. Hiccup snuggles closer to him, and Toothless' attention is instantly recaptured by the boy.

I let my gaze fall back to the flickering fire, where Punzie is covering herself with her hair, flopping down on the ground with a heavy sigh. Toothless gives her a reproachful look when Hiccup stirs, and she blushes slightly. "Sorry, sorry!"

I carefully remove my bow from where it rests in the middle of my chest, examining every inch of the gleaming wood by the light of the fire. A figure flickers in my peripheral vision, but it's just Jack, standing suddenly closer than he was. He kneels down next to me, his back to the glowing warmth. "I'll take watch."

"You took watch the night before the last," I remind him. "I should do it, it's only fair."

"I'm a winter spirit," he responds, like he always does. "I don't need as much sleep as mortals do."

"For a winter spirit, though, you look exhausted," I reply. "I'm not getting much sleep anyway, so you might as well take it. I'm gonna be up all night anyway."

"Particular reason why?" he raises an eyebrow, the firelight illuminating one half of his face as he turns slightly toward me.

My grip on my bow tightens. "That's none of your business."

He raises his hands in surrender. "Right, got it, sorry." He leaps nimbly up from the ground and into a tree branch, holding his staff tightly in one hand.

I gaze around for a second, but Toothless is already all curled up with his rider, both of them asleep, and Rapunzel is nearly there, so there's nothing too interesting to look at. With a sigh, I fall back upon the ground and stare up at the stars. They look dim tonight for some reason, dimmer than I remember. Even the sky is feeling down.

I think of the poster again, nailed to the tree trunk. Promising a reward if they found me and brought me back. Five thousand gold pieces. It's not like my parents don't have that kind of money, but I wish they wouldn't waste it. I'm never getting caught. They thought I would be easy to track, in the beginning, but I turned out not to be. I've stayed gone for a week and counting, and they're no closer to finding me at all. I smile to myself, bitter but triumphant. The pampered little princess of Dunbroch gave them more trouble than they ever expected.

But then again, I'm not the quiet, shy little damsel that most princesses are taught to be. I am so much more than that.

Of course, home is one of my taboo subjects. That subject that, whenever anyone tries to ask about it, I simply say, "I'm not going to talk about it" and the other three leave me alone. It works. I watch the stars grow seemingly dimmer and dimmer, and I push all thoughts of home from my mind. I told the other three that I didn't want to talk about it. Soâ€¦I'm not going to.

2. Chapter 2

****I Don't Want to Talk About It ****

****A/N: ****SURPRISE****

****Yes, this is the surprise. Updating all of my eighteen in-progress fics at once. It was pretty crazy, but I did it, and it's here, and good day to you all! I had tons of fun doing this, so I hope you guys have tons of fun reading this!****

****Well, here is the newest chapter :D and next chapter will be from Jack's POV. Please give me feedback in the reviews! ****

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**<p>- Hiccup â€" **

We never used to do watch before entering this forest, but the place makes us all a little uneasy. Jack especially seems tense and on edge, constantly glancing around, his staff clenched tightly in one hand as he flies. We have plenty of time to talk up there in the clouds all day, but he doesn't seem to want to and I'm awkward as a fish out of water and have long since given up trying to make friends. Who needs friends when I've got Toothless?

I actually was going to plead my case and try and take watch again

tonight, but by the time night began to fall, I knew that that would not be an option. It was everything I could do to keep my eyes open while the other three searched for a place to sleep, and now that I'm on solid ground again and that Toothless no longer depends on me, I hit the ground and curl up next to my dragon, letting my eyes fall closed at last.

Of course, sleep isn't exactly restful these days, which is why I prefer watch to sleep. Every time I close my eyes, I know the faces that are going to appear in my dreams. And they do. They always do. Every little mistake I made that day is spelled out so clearly in their hateful eyes.

This dream is a new one, not the familiar nightmare.

Toothless struggles against his chains, growling at anybody who dares come near, glaring at them with clear loathing in his green eyes. I want to run to him, to reassure him that things will be okay, but I'm frozen in the moment, realizing that my dad's eyes are locked on me. And I can only imagine what he's going to say, what he's going to do, what he's going to think.

_The Great Hall turns into a scene of my worst nightmares as he throws me in, slamming the door shut behind him, sending us into complete darkness. My breath catches in my throat as he raises his hand, and I suddenly realize what he is about to do just seconds before he does it. My ears ring with the force of the blow, and tears of pain spring to my eyes. "Dadâ€¦" My voice comes out very quiet. I'm cowering before my own father. I'm flinching. I'm genuinely scared of him. _

_I've been nervous around him before, trying to avoid getting yelled at, but I've never actually been scared of him. _

"_You've thrown your lot in with them," he sneers, glaring down at me where I lay on the stone floor. "You're not a Viking." _

In the moment, I didn't know what was coming, but my dream self does and I keep trying to crawl backward away from him, hoping to escape before he hits me again, before he utters the words.

"_You're not myâ€¦" _

"Hiccup!"

The shout has my eyes flying open and I'm instantly up, reaching for Toothless, aching to feel the dragon's nose beneath my fingers. I'm still half stuck in the nightmare, and desperate to know that my dragon is beside me.

"Hiccup, wake up!" It's Merida, her long, frizzy hair tickling my nose as she leans over me. I wrinkle my nose instinctively, trying to push her away.

"What's wrong? What's up?"

"You were having a nightmare," she explains shortly, taking to her feet and walking to the other side of the fire pit. She lingers over the blaze, warming her hands and sweeping her hair back from her face.

Merida barely pays me any attention, so it's surprising that she's the one who woke me; at least, until I glance around at the others and realize they're fast asleep, too. "You're on watch?" I frown.

She nods without looking up at me. "Jack tried to take it, but I told him no." The use of the spirit's real name is surprising; normally, she just calls him Snowflake or Frost.

"If you're tired, I can take over," I tell her, sitting up. Toothless startles awake when he realizes I'm no longer beside him, but calms instantly when he realizes where I am.

"You look like you could do with some more sleep," she won't meet my eyes as she talks, keeping her blue eyes fixed carefully on the warm blaze. "You should get the rest while you can, Jack will probably be awake in a couple hours and urging us all to get going, you know how he is." There's a note of fondness in her voice that is only partially disguised by annoyance.

"I'm not getting any more sleep," I reply honestly. "Not after that. You look like you could do with some, too."

"Hiccup, I'm not going to sleep," she says, and there's something hard in her tone now. "If you want to stay awake that's fine by me, but shut up about watch."

"Oâ€|kay." I drop the argument and lean against my dragon once more, resting my head on his stomach like he's a pillow. My hair appears to be tickling him, because he gives a slight dragon laugh and rolls over so my head rests on his back instead. I reach up and absently scratch him under the chin, staring up at the moon. It's full tonight, which strikes me as odd. It was full last night, too, and the night before that.

I remember this because as we flew around, looking for a place to sleep, Jack kept throwing the glowing white halo it created dark looks, as if the moon had personally done something to him to offend him.

For a moment, I just lay there, staring up at the moon and stars and contemplating Jack's odd behavior, and Merida's sharp tone, and Rapunzel's odd hair that she never lets us ask questions about. It's super strong and super thick and super blonde, but she refuses to tell us anything about it or cut it, even when she complains that it gets in her way.

My thoughts aren't even straying to my nightmare, which is surprising. Whenever I have that dream, I always lay awake for hours thinking about it, but tonight, I'm already beginning to doze again.

I curl up closer to Toothless and I wrap one arm around him, ceasing scratching him, just staying with him. For once, I feel safe and warm and loved, simply because he's there beside me.

And then comes an odd, out-of-place noise amongst the cool night breeze and the hissing and crackling of the flames: an arrow being notched within a bow. I sit up and open my eyes, looking around at

Merida. Sure enough, her bow is out and she's aiming it into the trees.

"Are you going to shoot?" I demand blearily.

She puts a stern finger to her lips before her blue eyes slide away from me again, back to whatever she's looking at. Standing up slowly, drawing her bowstring even farther back, she retreats away from the edge of the trees, closer to Jack and Rapunzel.

I take to my feet and Toothless is instantly on alert, his ears low over his head, his chin nearly touching the ground.

"Ah!" Merida goes sprawling, tripping over Rapunzel as she walked backwards. Her arrow flies out of the bow and Rapunzel, unsurprisingly, shoots awake, shoving Merida off her.

"Get off â€" you're so _heavy_" the blonde moans.

"Shut up! Shut up!" Merida is already frantically notching another arrow while also trying to slam a palm over Rapunzel's mouth.

"Ladies, ladies, what's going on?" Jack demands, stirring and pointing his staff at nothing and everything.

"Merida jumped on me." Rapunzel sounds annoyed.

"There's someone in the woods! Guys, be quiet!" Merida begs them.

"You jumped on her? Jeez, no wonder she woke up," Jack teases, but Merida turns her bow on him.

"Be quiet, Snowflake, or I _will_ shoot you."

"Hello, mates."

As one, we all wheel around to face the source of the sudden voice, laced with a rather thick accent.

Toothless' growls grow in volume as the figure steps out of the shadows and I glance around at the others to see if it's just me seeing things. There is apparently a rabbit walking out of the woods at us. But it's a rabbit like I've never seen them before.

This rabbit not only stands on his hind legs, but he is speaking to us. Assuming the voice came from him, of course, and I really hope it didn't. The rabbit is easily six feet tall with muscles that could rival my father's and a couple polished wooden boomerangs in his hand.

Merida turns her bow upon the intruder, Rapunzel jerks her frying pan up from the ground, Toothless readies himself to charge, but Jackâ€|Jack is the most surprising of all. He tenses up, but doesn't turn his staff on the rabbit. "Can I ask what you're doing here, Bunny?"

The rabbit, Bunny apparently, (_so_ original) inspects one of his boomerangs at length as he talks. "You could, but I probably won't

answer."

"No," Jack's voice is low and surprisingly bitter. "You never did answer my questions."

"Fellas?" Bunny pointedly ignores this rather passive-aggressive remark.

And then I know for sure that I'm dreaming, because a huge, furry creature with a mustache like Gobber's comes flying out of the woods behind Bunny. Three more just like it follow, and they're all carrying a red sack upon their shoulders. Without hesitating, one of them comes up to Jack, grabs his staff surprisingly gently and, without further ado, stuffs him into one of the red sacks.

Toothless is watching in apparent interest, but when one of the furry creatures grabs me, he starts to get a little protective. I see a blast of bright blue, signifying that he just shot a fireball at the creature, but then I'm stuffed in the sack.

I hear another of the creatures grunt as Merida shoots him with her bow, but then the creature forces me further into the bag. I feel myself being lifted up like I'm weightless and then I feel myself being forced through a very tight doorway. I wince and grab the sides of the bag, pummeling the sack with my fists, but I might as well be sitting quietly for all the good it's doing; not one of the creatures pays me any attention whatsoever.

We're through the doorway then, and I land on a cool but hard surface. I hear three more thumps and guess what must have happened to the others.

Toothless frantically tears apart the sack to get to me, licking and crooning and nuzzling me like crazy.

"I'm okay, I'm okay," I whisper, but my attention is drawn away from my dragon by a loud shout, seemingly of joy.

"There they are!"

Raising my eyes from the green reptilian pupils, I see the strangest collection of people I have ever seen in my life.

3. Chapter 3

****I Don't Want to Talk About It ****

****A/N: I hope you all enjoy. Next chapter will be Rapunzel's POV, and I hope you liked Jack's. ****

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><p>- Jack â€"

The moment I'm out of the sack, my eyes are scanning the room, mapping out the exits, taking note of all the yetis â€" including the one holding my staff. I expect I'll have to fight him on it, but he offers it back to me without so much as a challenge. I keep my eyes carefully locked on my only weapon in this world as I take it from

him. Tightening my grip on it, I glance around the room once more, taking in the people in it this time.

Merida is crawling out of the sack, running her hands through her frizzy orange curls as she tries in vain to restrain them; Rapunzel's green eyes are wide as she gazes about herself in wonder; and Hiccup is so busy assuring his dragon that he's okay that he really doesn't notice much else. But I notice it. They're all standing there, all the Guardians, smiling hopefully at us, like they think if they make a good impression, I'll actually sit here and listen to them.

My anger rises, and my vision is clouded suddenly by a hazy mass of red. I am not going to listen to them. If they're trying to justify themselvesâ€

"There they are!" Santa declares happily, spreading wide his hands. "Jack Frost!"

"Rapunzel Corona!" The tooth fairy squeals, clapping her hands together in delight. She offers me a slight wave. "Hello, Jack! I've heard a lot about you! And your teeth!"

"Myâ€|my what?" Forget listening to them â€" I can't even really make sense of what they're saying.

Sandy flashes a couple symbols above his head, smiling at Merida and Hiccup in turn, waving at them. Hiccup appears fascinated by the shimmering golden form, and takes a long second to wave back. Merida has clearly wrestled her bow away from the yetis, because another arrow is notched, and she keeps pointing it at each of the Guardians in turn, like she's not sure who to shoot first.

"What did you call me?" Rapunzel asks the hyperactive fairy. Thankfully, Tooth turns her attentions away from me to explain whatever she called Rapunzel â€" I didn't really hear.

"Please, put the bow down," North adds to Merida, making calming gestures with his hands. "We are not going to hurt you. We are here to protect you."

"_Protect_ me?" Merida narrows her blue eyes. "I don't trust men who look like they stepped out of a Christmas storybook."

To my intense surprise, North laughs. I mean, like actually laughs, not a light little titter to diffuse the tension. It's genuine, and Merida just looks even more enraged at the fact that he has the nerve to laugh at her.

She tightens her grip on her bow and shifts it, so the arrow points towards him. "What's so funny?"

"Merida," North clasps his hands. "You are in no danger here. I promise you that. I am Santa Claus, and you may call me North. That there is Tooth," he points to the fairy, "Sandman," he gestures to the golden man, smiling and waving at her again, "and Bunny." He barely even looks at the huge rabbit standing just behind him, inspecting his boomerangs at great length.

Merida looks a little faint. I think North overwhelmed her. "You mean, likeâ€|the actual Santa Claus, who brings kids presents at

Christmas and everything?"

North chuckles and nods, and Rapunzel looks up, excited. "I know who you are!" She exclaims. "I read about you in the storybooks in my toâ€" And then she cuts herself off again, keeping herself guarded, as she always does.

North, Merida and I continue to stare at her for a second before I just give the other two a shrug. Rapunzel and Tooth return to their conversation, and Hiccup pipes up, looking confused. "What's Christmas?"

North gasps like this is the worst thing in the world, to not know about Christmas, and takes Hiccup aside. I watch the boy's eyes grow wide as dinner plates the longer North talks. Merida watches the exchange with her arms crossed, and Bunny finally lifts his eyes from his boomerang, leaning forward to speak with her. His voice is surprisingly gentle as he asks her if she's alright.

"I think I've got it all," she replies, though she still looks a little faint. "You're childhood legends, aren't you? Like you're the Easter Bunny?"

The rabbit nods, and as the two of them begin their own conversation, I realize I've been left alone with Sandy.

And that's not actually a bad thing. Sandy's a pretty cool guy, to be frank. He's generally nice to me whenever our paths cross, and he's wicked funny. I guess I'm just not really sure what to say to him, so for a bit of time, the silence between us just stretches on, punctuated very obviously by the fact that everyone around us is chattering. Finally, I kneel down to his height and start asking questions. "Anyone want to tell me why I'm here?"

Sandy has clearly been waiting for me to ask this question. A barrage of symbols flash above his head: a snowflake, an outline of somebody I don't recognize, an outline of a girl holding a bow, an outline of a boy and his dragon, and then a girl with superlong hairâ€|

Even though I get what the outlines and snowflake are meant to represent, the symbols are flashing by so fast, and he gives so little explanation that it makes it difficult to understand. "That's not really helping, but thanks, little man."

As I rise back up to my full height again, I see that Rapunzel, Hiccup and Merida have finished up their conversations, and are looking to North for further guidance.

"We must have done something really bad to get the Big Four all together," I comment, swinging my staff over my shoulder. I don't really know what could possibly have gathered them here, but I know that the other three kids all look apprehensive, maybe even a little afraid, and I want to put their minds at ease. "Whoa, wait." I raise one hand as a new idea comes to me. "Are we on the naughty list?"

"Ha!" North jabs. "_On_ naughty list? You hold the record!" He points at me as he talks. "And you," he points at Merida, "you better work on your behavior, or you'll be getting coal."

Merida looks shocked, and I can't help but smirk.

"But no matter," North shrugs it off. "We overlook. Now, we are wiping clean the slate."

The other three exchange glances, but I know the Guardians. They don't ever do something for somebody else unless they want something from them in return. I know them. "How come?" I don't try to keep the distrust out of my voice.

"I tell you how come," North replies. "Because_ you _are Guardian," he points at me, "and you three," he gestures to Rapunzel, Merida, and Hiccup, "need our protection."

There is a long period of silence. Tooth smiles hopefully at me. Sandy gives me a thumbs-up.

"What the hell?" I finally manage to blurt.

"Excuse me, I don't need your protection," Merida angrily swings her hair over one shoulder, her blue eyes blazing.

"I kind of have a dragon," Hiccup gestures to the Night Fury. "I'm all set in terms of protection."

Rapunzel alone is the only one who's silent â€" she looks shell-shocked, like she's about to cry. Tooth's purple eyes soften when they focus on the blonde girl, but I don't have time to puzzle this out â€" I'm too busy trying to figure out why on earth North just told me I am one of them.

"We have explaining to do," North remarks to no one in particular. Then he clasps his hands together. "Jack, you are Guardian. You see, just take this oath," he grabs a huge, dusty book from off a nearby table and flips it open, "and everything is settled. See?"

"No, I don't see," I snap. "What makes you think I want to be a Guardian in the first place?"

Tooth drifts away from us to talk to Rapunzel again, but everyone else's attention is still fixed on us. Bunny's face spasms, as if he can't begin to fathom why I would ask such a question. North looks bemused, and laughs loudly again, gesturing to me like he's inviting the others to share the joke. "Of course you do."

"Why are you picking me now?" I keep a tight grip on my staff, scared to let it go. Out of the corner of my eye, I see Merida is guarding my left side, her bow fixed firmly on North again. "Why didn't you pick me three hundred years ago, exactly?"

North looks at me in surprise. "Pick? You think _we_ pick?"

"Umâ€¦yeahâ€¦".

"No!" He replies angrily. "You were _chosen_! Like we were all chosen! By Man in Moon!"

This gets my attention. If I had a heartbeat â€" which I don't â€" it would have stopped then and there. I think I might be holding my

breath as I whisper, "The man in the moonâ€¦he talks to you?" Why is he talking to the Guardians and not me? I hear the moon speak, and apparently they do, tooâ€¦does this mean that I'm not completely crazy? My mind whirls with possibilities. And why would he pick me to be the newest Guardian? I'm not fit for any of that stuff.

"Last night, Jack. He chose you."

"Maybe," Bunny counters North's statement.

North glares at him before meeting my gaze. "If Man in Moon chose you to be a Guardian," he says quietly, steadily, "you must have something very special inside."

He doesn't say anything else, and I find I'm too caught up in my own thoughts to even voice any of the million questions I'm longing to ask. Hiccup instantly jumps in with his own. "Soâ€¦care to explain why we need protection, Santa? Or, more importantly, what we need protection from?"

"Pitch," North replies tensely.

That has my attention again, momentarily diverting me. "The Boogeyman?"

"Pitch hasâ€¦been watching you." North is choosing his words carefully. "The forest we found you â€" it's been completely overrun by his Nightmares, anyone would know to stay away."

Merida shoots me an impatient look. It was me who suggested we take the shortcut through the forest, after all. I offer an apologetic shrug before North recaptures our attention.

"Man in moon has been employing all his efforts to protect you, and bring you all to us safely. And you've all arrivedâ€¦mostly unscathed." His gaze lingers on each of us in turn. Hiccup squirms a little, fidgeting with his sleeve. "Pitch has undoubtedly discovered that you would be of use to us, Jack, and wants to dispose of you â€" but he has held back because he sees that you travel with offspring of lightning and death," he nods at Hiccup's dragon, and both the dragon and the boy look startled. "Mortal weapons only affect him up to a certain point, but no doubt he was hoping to avoid your bow as well." The Guardian fixes Merida next with his twinkling gaze.

She holds it steadily for a second before looking away. "So? What? Just because some ancient legend is stirring up trouble, we need protection?"

"Pitch has eye on all of you," North replies forcefully. "I think he imagines you could be of use to him â€" and whatever is going on inside Boogeyman's brain is not good."

"So, basically, you want me to be a Guardian," I begin. "You want me to link hands with all of you and skip happily into the sunset. You want these three to be left under your protection, andâ€¦that's it?"

"It's not so easy," Tooth looks away from her conversation with Rapunzel, but still keeps a hand on the girl's shoulder. "When Pitch threatens us, he threatens the children as well. We need your help,

Jack, in fighting him off, and we need to protect the three of you, because we're afraid that the reason for his sudden attacks are linked to you. If he wants you, his reasons can't be good."

The four of us exchange glances. My head is swirling with so much at once that it's impossible to keep it all in, or straight. Briefly, I cut my gaze to Rapunzel, who looks like she's been crying â€" she wipes at her eyes and offers me a shaky smile.

"Care to explain who Pitch is?" Merida finally breaks the silence.

"Boogeyman," North repeats.

She rolls her eyes. "Like that explains anything. I mean, like, why we need to be protected from him. I guess he's done some pretty bad stuff, but anything in particular we need to know about?"

North considers this for a moment. "Killed one thousand people at once. Drove millions more over the edge into insanity. Creates nightmares. Targets people's worst fears. Still think you don't need protection?"

4. Chapter 4

****I Don't Want to Talk About It ****

****A/N: I don't really like the ending, but mehhhhhh. ****

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><p>- Rapunzel â€"

Everything around me is silent. I can see people's lips moving, Jack looking angry, North concerned, Bunny annoyed, Merida frustrated, but I can't make sense of what they're saying. My world is spinning, the single truth it's revolved on for so long suddenly being yanked out from underneath it. The carpet was just yanked out from under my feet, and nobody else seems to notice. I keep running through Tooth's words in my mind, trying to find a way to deny them, some solid evidence I have that she was lying.

I used to play pretend that I was adopted. I don't really know why, I just used to pretend it. I'd pretend that there was a real family, waiting for me just outside the tower, and one day they'd find me again, and they'd want me back, and I'd leave my mother and go join them. But you know, I never really believed it would happen. I fantasized about it for years, mostly because the book that was currently my favorite featured a girl finding out she was adopted, and of course being horrified and going on an exciting adventure to find her birth parents who turned out to be a king and queen.

Pretty silly, right?

And now that story is coming true, only I'm the main character. I can hardly think straight. All those thoughts I used to have when I used to play out that book, all those thoughts about my mother never looking a thing like me, they're all rushing back. I look down at my hands, clenched into fists around the pale purple skirt of my dress.

I guess I just need to see my feet on the ground to remind myself that I still exist on this plane. I slowly unclench my fists from my dress, but my hands are numb and cold. I can barely feel them, and even when the fabric no longer touches them, I can't tell the difference.

I wipe at my eyes again as Jack looks back at me, concern clear in his blue eyes. I wonder if I started crying noisily, but I don't think I did. I've always been good at silent crying. I vaguely register North speaking, a lot of chirping, and suddenly we're ushered outside, but I look around at the others. Jack is looking furious and Merida, to my astonishment, is pressing close to Jack, holding her bow out again. Hiccup looks surprisingly upset, but also thoughtful, like he's trying to make a hard decision. I look around when a cold blast of air hits my bare legs and feet. We appear to be standing on ice, outside the building we were just in. I start sliding back out of reality right about then, but Jack and Merida are both yelling at North so loudly that I'm jerked back to earth again.

"I'm not going anywhere with you!" Jack has the butt of his staff resting on the ground, and he looks like he's about to summon one of his deadly ice blasts.

"And I'm not climbing into some rickety oldâ€"

The great double doors off to the side suddenly burst open, and Merida is cut short by a sudden, sleek red vehicle pulling up in front of her, balanced on gleaming golden runners. Reindeer bigger than the sleigh itself stand in front of it, making little noises, their breath coming out in misty puffs of air.

"Sleigh," Merida finishes, sounding awed.

Jack bites his lip, glaring at North. "Okay. One ride. But that's it."

North grins. "Everyone loves the sleigh." He hops in first, quickly followed by Sandy, Merida, and Jack. "Rapunzel, Hiccup, Bunny," he barks. "What are you three waiting for?"

"Iâ€|Iâ€|sorry," I stutter, sounding like an idiot as I gingerly climb on. Looking around, I realize Tooth has disappeared without telling me where she's gone. Feeling slightly hurt, I look to Jack, the most informed one of the group. He takes my arm, his cold seeping into my very bones, and smiles reassuringly at me as he guides me to a seat.

"Where's Tooth?" I whisper.

"She had to leave â€" her fairies are having trouble at her palace, and she flew on ahead of us to take care of it, but we'll be meeting up with her to help."

"I think my tunnels might be faster, mate," Bunny says nervously, kicking the wheel of the sleigh, which does look a little unsteady. "And uh, and safer."

"Get in," North reaches over and grabs Bunny by the scruff of the neck, depositing him beside Sandy. "Hiccup?"

Hiccup shakes his head, slinging a leg over Toothless' back. "I'll follow. Toothless can't fly on his own."

"Very well," North shrugs. "Buckle up."

"Where are the seatbelts?" Bunny demands, looking around the sleigh.

North laughs. "That was just expression. Are we ready?"

"No," Bunny whimpers.

Sandy gives him a thumbs-up. I look away from the Guardians, fixing my gaze on Jack and Merida, who are squished uncomfortably close in the sleigh's tight quarters, both looking like they'd pretty much rather be anywhere but here, Merida especially. She has her hand on her bow, like she thinks Jack might make a move and she'll have to shoot him when he does.

The next few minutes are a barrage of confusing sounds, mostly because I'm beginning to space out again, running through everything Tooth told me. I'm a Corona. Rapunzel Corona. And the kingdom just beyond my tower, Mother always told me, was called Corona. How can I not be a Gothel? I've finally given up fantasizing that there are nicer people out there who are going to take me home. I've finally accepted that my mother will probably never love me in the way I want her to. And now to be told that she's not even my mother? How do these people expect me to feel?

Jack scoots a little closer to me to give Merida some room, putting a hand over mine. "You okay, Punzie?"

My voice doesn't really sound like mine â€" I sound numb and hollow, which I am. "Why?"

"Why what?" He frowns.

"Why do youâ€¦why are you asking me that?" I look up at him, meet his eyes. Blue, and filled with concern. "I didn't realize you cared that much. We never talk. We never even really make eye contact. We hardly know each other."

Jack's eyes soften, and he squeezes my hand gently. "We're a team."

"A team?" I repeat the word, my voice unsteady. The word is unfamiliar to me. I don't think I've ever been part of a team before, except if you count me and Pascal.

Merida shifts slightly in her seat, nudging Jack in the side. "Scoot over."

Jack looks away from me to give her an exaggerated eye roll. "Sorry bout this," he adds to me. "The princess wants more space. Can you scoot over any?"

"Don't call me that."

Sandy realizes our dilemma and gives me an apologetic smile, pointing

to Bunny. The rabbit is whispering things under his breath, his eyes tightly closed. Jack looks amused by this as Sandy presses himself as close to the rabbit as we can. Before the sleigh speeds up, Jack looks back and, instinctively, I do, too. Hiccup is behind us, tailing the sleigh closely. When he sees Jack looking at him, he gives a little wave, like, 'hey, I'm just chilling' or something.

I turn my head back around, feeling the tears beginning to sting my eyes again, though that might just be from the cold air. Either way, I glance down so nobody will see, wiping my eyes quickly. Corona. I repeat the word in my head, telling myself that if I just think about it long enough, I'll get used to it. Jack bumps into me again â€" he's sitting so close to me now that he's practically in my lap, but I can't scoot over any to give him any room â€" there are just too many people crowded onto the seat.

Merida throws a dark look over her shoulder at Hiccup. "I hope Hiccup's enjoying himself, with all that space."

Jack chuckles, the sound surprisingly lighthearted. "Probably why he wouldn't get in the sleigh in the first place, don't you think?"

North looks back at us all, his eyes twinkling with amusement. "Hang on, everybody! I know a shortcut!" He pulls a sparkling snow globe out of his coat, whispering something to it, his mouth so close that his breath fogs up the glass. A swirling vortex of colors appears in front of the sleigh, and we pretty much all gasp. Hiccup swears loudly and tries to steer Toothless into the vortex, but the dragon is showing some resistance. Jack leaps onto the back of the sleigh, allowing Merida some more room. I smile apologetically at Sandy, trying to scoot over so he can breathe again.

He smiles back, forming a question mark above his head and pointing at me.

I nod slowly. "Yeah. Yeah, I'm okay." Not really, but I'm hoping I will be. So I just smile at him and then turn back around to stare straight ahead as North steers the sleigh into the portal, feeling myself sinking back into confusion and despair. How will I ever find out the truth? How will I ever know whether Tooth or Mother was telling the truth? Will I ever know? I never should have left my tower.

Moments later, wispy black things are flying at us out of nowhere, and Bunny is screaming even louder, if that's possible. One of the wisps shoots so close to North's head that black sand coats his beard. He brushes it easily away â€" it appears to dissolve in midair, and he looks frightened by this, though I don't see the problem. Jumping onto the front of the sleigh, he grabs Jack by his hoodie and hands him the reins. "Here! Take over!"

North whips out his twin swords and begins slashing at the wisps and Jack nervously pulls on the reins, making the reindeer go faster. Bunny leans over the side, presumably to vomit, but Sandy is trying to figure out what the black things are. One of them, downed by North's swords, dissolves, leaving behind a gleaming golden box. "They're stealing the teeth!" Bunny looks up from puking, which might not be puking, might just be watching the wisps. Who knows.

I glance back to see if Hiccup is having any difficulties " he is. Toothless is blasting the wisps with everything he has, and one of them hisses right in Hiccup's face before the dragon gets to it. My confusion mounts when I see how frightened Hiccup looks. I've never seen him look that scared. He's so distracted that he and Toothless begin to fall before he remembers to press down the tail fin, and they rise back up to our height again.

Jack lets go of the reins long enough to lunge out of the sleigh and grab something, but we begin to plummet, so Jack quickly steers us straight again. Meanwhile, Merida is trying to "guide" him, but really it appears to be making him more nervous. "Left! Left, there's a wisp that way! No, you idiot, my left! Okay, wait! Slow up! Slow up! SLOW UP!"

"I'M TRYING! THIS ISN'T AS EASY AS IT LOOKS!" Jack yells right back at her, and beyond him, I can see we're heading for a huge golden platform. Bunny and Sandy apparently see it, too, because Bunny hides his eyes and Sandy takes drastic action. He leans over and physically yanks the reins out of Jack's hands. It's not enough to stop us, but it does slow our fall, and we land reasonably painlessly on the platform. Well, most of us do.

Merida crawls out, her hair a wreck, one arrow snapped cleanly in half from where she landed on it. She pushes her hair out of her face and sits up on her knees. For a moment, we all do the same, breathing heavily, just trying to catch our breath after the adrenaline rush.

Merida stands up and looks at Jack. "You," she says, "are the worst driver I have ever met."

"Thanks for your save, Sandy," I tell him, and he smiles good-naturedly at me.

Jack jumps up to start arguing with Merida.

North, Sandy and Bunny exchange glances. Bunny brushes black sand and golden sand out of his fur. North inspects his swords. "That went well."

5. Chapter 5

****I Don't Want to Talk About It ****

****A/N:** Well, here's the next chapter! As you can imagine, I'm just going in the pattern I established with the first four: Merida first, then Hiccup, then Jack, then Rapunzel. I should probably have done Jack and Rapunzel reversed, but I like to have their POVs arranged so it occurs at a particularly emotional moment for them, and after what Rapunzel discovered about herself in chapter four, I thought that would definitely qualify. Merida's not having any emotional moments here, though, unless you count her small scene of angst about her mother halfway in. Anyway, I feel a bit like the Guardians bit off more than they could chew with bringing these four on xD ******

* * *

><p>- Merida " "

I barely listen to Jack's excuses for his horrible steering. I should probably be shaken due to the near-death encounter I just had, but this place—it's so beautiful, I don't even know what to say or think. I always thought that palaces were superficial buildings, merely a temporary shelter, a pretty one, at that, but nothing else. Now I see I was wrong.

The mosaic floor seems to almost shift beneath my shoes, and everything—the walls, the ceiling, everything—is made of gold. The palace does not feel like a cage, like the last one I was in. This one is open to the sky in places, and the walls are constantly broken up by huge gaps. Instead of giving the impression of windows or unfinished architecture, it just finishes off the whole setting, making it more beautiful than ever. A cool gust of wind blows through one of the gaps, tangling my hair even worse than it is already. A tinkling noise sounds above my head and when I look up, I see an elaborate crystal chandelier, dangling from the open ceiling.

The sound of metal brings me back to earth. When I look around, I see North is sheathing his swords, brushing black sand out of his white beard. He looks cautiously around the palace, taking a few steps forward. "Tooth?" he calls softly, with an uncharacteristic gentleness to his voice. "Tooth?"

There's no response except for a buzzing sound, and Tooth suddenly appears before us, looking forlorn and lost. She's got her hands clasped in front of her, and tears brighten her big purple eyes. She seems almost unable to fly in a straight line, because she keeps zipping into walls and bumping her hips on shelves before at last admitting defeat and slumping to the ground, defeated.

The Guardians engulf her immediately, and I exchange uncomfortable glances with Hiccup and Jack before the three of us follow them, unsure of what else to do. Toothless follows Hiccup, of course, so technically there are four of us. That's not right—there should be five.

"Punzie?" I turn to look at her before I settle myself next to Tooth and the other Guardians. "You coming, lass?"

Punzie is still in the crashed, broken remains of the sleigh, motionless and staring. She doesn't even blink for a long second, and I start to wonder if she's all there. What would the tooth fairy have had to tell her that's so upsetting that it's reduced her to this?

The blonde girl slowly seems to come back to herself, rising to her feet and walking slowly, unsteadily out of the sleigh. She has her arms spread out carefully, like she thinks she needs balance.

She seats herself on the floor across from Tooth, and I turn my attention back to the conversation that the fairy is having with the Guardians.

"He took my fairies," she's saying tearfully. "And the teeth—all of them! Everything—everything is gone!" She looks on the verge of putting her head in her hands, but something stops her, capturing our attention. A sort of chirping sound—

I look around for the source of the noise. Jack apparently managed to rescue one of the mini fairies while the rest of us weren't looking, and the tiny thing flies out to meet her mother, resting in the feathered hands.

Tooth's eyes sparkle with more tears as she strokes the small body in her palm. "Oh, thank goodness," she whispers, with a kind of motherly sincerity in her voice. "One of you is all right."

For a moment, sitting there, she reminds me of my mother. My mum, before she became completely obsessed with making me into the princess she thought I ought to be. Unlike my mum, Tooth is just happy one of her fairies is okay. I wish my mum cared about me like that. But I know she doesn't, and that's okay. Or at least, that's what I tell myself as I lift my chin slightly, determined not to feel upset anymore. I cried out all my tears the day she yelled at me, the day I ripped the tapestry, the day—the day that the truth finally came out between us, the day that she finally told me why.

I close my eyes, unable to watch the scene any longer. I don't want to watch this and think of my mother, not when I'm so determined not to need her.

Tooth sighs as she comforts the little fairy in her hand, still whispering soothingly to her. "I—I don't know what I'm going to do," she admits to the Guardians helplessly. "Everything is gone, the children won't believe in me anymore—I mean—what am I going to do?"

We're all quiet as we consider Tooth's predicament. Mine falls by the wayside. I guess that's the good thing about having other people to care for; your own problems get lost in the way of helping somebody else, and pretty soon you've completely forgotten about your own. "Well—" I finally find the words to say. "Well, I mean, you can't just take it sitting down, right? You need to find this Pitch Black, and give him what he's got coming to him."

"Hunt down the Boogeyman?" Hiccup's voice floats over to me, where he's sitting between North and Bunny. His green eyes flick over to Tooth once, pity clear in his gaze, before he fixes them back on me. "You mean, the guy who killed a thousand people at once and targets somebody's worst fears? I'm sure hunting him down would work out great."

"No, mates," Bunny interrupts Hiccup. "She's right," he indicates me, and I can't help but feel surprised. "We need to find Pitch, and make him regret ever messing with us, or the kids."

Sandy raises a hand in polite but obvious disagreement, a few sand images flashing above his head.

"Ah," North nods, "Sandy is right. Before we hunt down Pitch, we must renew belief in Tooth. We must all be at our full strength, if we're going to face him."

"Yeah, but why would Pitch take the teeth?" Jack chips in, his face wrinkled in confusion. "What, does he just like the blood and gums?"

"It's not the teeth he wanted," Tooth replies sadly; she was just beginning to look hopeful again until Jack mentioned the teeth. "It's the memories inside them. That's why we collect the teeth, Jack."

He looks very surprised at this, and I watch Rapunzel and him drifting off, presumably to talk to Tooth a little more about memories and childhood teeth.

This leaves Hiccup, Sandy, North, Bunny, Toothless and I. All staring at each other. Very, very awkwardly.

Toothless has the right idea; he settles himself down like he's planning a nice, long nap and Hiccup rests his hand on his dragon's head for a second as he surveys us.

Bunny inspects his boomerangs to avoid looking at the rest of us, and North's blue eyes follow the progress of Rapunzel, Jack and Tooth; they're standing in front of a mural painted over the water; Jack balances on top of the water, on a path of ice, and Rapunzel stands uncertainly next to him, clearly expecting the ice to break beneath her, and Tooth hovers over them, her hummingbird wings buzzing behind her.

Eager for the awkwardness to end, I try to start a new conversation. "So, once you guys figure out how to restore the children's belief in Tooth, we'll be going after Pitch?"

North frowns. "No."

"What? But I thought you saidâ€"

"_We_ aren't doing anything," Bunny takes over for North, speaking flatly. "Sandy, North, Tooth and I are gonna go after him, the rest of youâ€"

North clears his throat significantly, glancing pointedly at Jack.

"Yeah, okay, and Frost," Bunny relents. "So, Frost and the rest of us will be going after Pitch, but you, Hiccup, and Rapunzel all need to get back to the Pole and wait until the danger has passed."

The idea of wandering around Santa Claus' workshop would be a pleasant one on any other day; but today, I feel my face flush with anger. Standing back and letting somebody else do the fighting? That's cowardly. I can't do that. "I want to help. If Pitch is hurting people, and he's after us, we need to let him know we're not defenseless, so he won't even try to attack us."

Sandy hastily shakes his head no, sand images forming rapidly over his head, at such a pace that I'm surprised North and Bunny can even read them.

"Sandy is right," North tells me. "You will only be liability if we take you along."

My anger rises even closer to the surface. "You've seen me! I could help with my bow, and Hiccup's got a Night Fury, and Rapunzelâ€| " I highly doubt the Boogeyman would be afraid of a barefoot blonde girl in a pale purple dress, whose only weapon is a frying pan and whose

knowledge of the world seems limited. "Rapunzel's hair," I finish lamely, not wanting to make her sound any weaker than the rest of us.

All I really know about Rapunzel's hair is that it's a taboo subject, and that she's never used it for anything that I've seen, except swinging herself from tree to tree. I glance over at the golden-haired head by the mural; she looks shocked, and like she's about to cry again, but she's not crying yet. Jack appears to be comforting her. I hear Tooth's voice, distorted by the gurgling water and wind blowing in through the gaps and making the chandelier and wind chimes sound above us.

North follows my gaze, looking over at them too. "But if Pitch sees you in action," he explains softly, "he'll target your weaknesses. He only needs to see you once, and know your name, to know your fears."

I can't even begin to imagine what I fear, or what Pitch could possibly torment me with. Maybe if she transformed into Mor'du? I guess I'm scared of the bear, but Dad went to such lengths when I was little to make sure I wasn't scared of the creature, even after he lost his leg. Not to mention he kept an eye on me while I learned archery, making sure I grew up to become the finest archer in the land.

It appears that Hiccup could imagine what he's afraid of, though, because he looks extremely uncomfortable at this thought, and starts stroking Toothless' head. The dragon purrs under the gentle touch.

"But hasn't he already seen us?" I'm almost surprised by my own memory; I guess I'd filed the news that we were being watched away until I was ready to deal with it, and now I am. "You yourself said he's been watching us as we go through his forest; if he's seen us before, why are you so determined to keep us away from the fight?"

"Pitch himself probably hasn't seen you," Bunny informs me, even though I was directing my question at North. "He sends his Nightmares and shadows out to do his dirty work, and then they report back to him. It's simple, easy, and it means he's informed of your movements without having to take a break and watch you himself."

I consider this piece of news as I settle myself on the palace floor, gazing across the water at Tooth, Jack and Rapunzel. The gentle mist rising off the water drifts into my field of vision from where I lay, distorting their images.

I can still faintly hear the others talking above me, but I close my eyes, suddenly hit by how tired I am. I didn't think about it, but I have stayed up the whole night through, and now we're in another part of the world, far away from the forest where we used to be; I'm probably still running on that time, not this one.

I become aware of the buzzing sound of Tooth's wings again and I drag myself into a sitting position to watch her, Rapunzel and Jack cross the water again. Just as they reach the bank and begin making their way back to us, I notice that Tooth is leaving a trail of iridescent feathers in her wake, fluttering off her person and landing,

forgotten, on the ground behind her.

With each feather that falls, a blank space appears in the mural she was showing Jack and Rapunzel. When she finally looks behind herself and realizes what's happening, she gives a gasp. "Oh, no!"

The others, who have noticed nothing, are all instantly up on their feet, racing toward her. I guess they're all expecting to find Pitch around every corner or something.

"What's happening?" Bunny demands, whipping out his boomerangs again, clearly preparing himself for battle.

North unsheathes his swords, but Tooth just shakes her head. "Look!" She points to the feathers littering the ground. "The children...they've already stopped believing in meâ€|we're too lateâ€|"

"No!" North shakes his head, his swords still in his hands. He spins in a slow circle, thoughtful and pensive. "No, not too late. We willâ€|we willâ€|we will collect the teeth!" He does a little dance of celebration, like collecting the teeth will solve all their problems.

"What?" Tooth looks completely shocked; she must have never collected the teeth for herself before, unlike all the old legends that say she did.

"If we get teeth," North gestures vaguely with his sword, "children keep believing in you!"

"Uh, can we get a little bit more realistic here?" Hiccup raises his hand, as if we're in one of my princess lessons or something. "You do realize you guys are talking millions of kids, right? And that this will take roughly all day for us to completeâ€"

"Again with the us," Bunny reminds him. "There is no us involved in this â€" there is me, North, Tooth and Sandy, and then there is you, Merida, Frost and Rapunzel. You aren't involved in this."

"We are now," I tell him. "You brought us into this worldâ€"

"Pitch brought you into this world!"

"â€"And there's no going back out," I finish steadily. "Even if I can't fight him myself, and even if collecting bloody baby teeth is not on my top ten list of favorite pastimes, and also strikes me as creepy, I want to do it. I want to help."

Jack appears to have finally gotten over his recent shock, and is frowning at me.

"We don't need your help," Bunny snaps. "You'd be better off staying in the Pole."

"I won't," I reply stubbornly, unconsciously notching an arrow as I talk. I don't know why, but that habit seems to make people uncomfortable. "If you don't let me come along with you, I'm going to walk right back out and go try and find Pitch, and nothing you do or say can stop me."

There's actually probably a lot this group of immortals could do to stop me, but I raise my bow to my face, drawing back to my cheek for extra emphasis. I pretend to be examining a tiny hole in one of the columns, preparing myself to shoot at it.

"Iâ€¦I want to come, too." The quiet voice of the blonde lass surprises me so much I nearly drop my bow. I manage to keep a grip, but I released the string in my shock, and the arrow flies out, burying itself deeply in the ground near Bunny's foot. Bunny jumps back, but the rest of us are still focused on Rapunzel.

"Youâ€¦you what?" Jack crouches down, closer to the girl's height.

"I want to go with them," Punzie tells him quietly, brushing her thick golden hair out of her eyes. "Jack, I can't make you come with us, too, but I want my memories back. I want to know who I am."

6. Chapter 6

****I Don't Want to Talk About It****

****A/N:** Wow, I've pretty much quit writing this fic for approval, and just started writing it for me :D which feels really good. When I write a story for myself and for fun, I tend to enjoy it more than stories I end up writing for the readers. This chapter's a little shorter than the others, but I like it. I genuinely liked writing Hiccup in this chapter, because the last chapter we got to see him in, chapter 2, was when he was going a little crazy with angst about his dad xD anyway, I think I've actually written an official Happycup chapter now, and this has followed RotG closely enough to take off with my real plan for ANGST AND PAIN AND TORTURE AHAHAHAHAHAHA
clears throat sorry about that. I'm a little too excited about this fic, huh? Well, the emotional torment is starting. And I love deep emotional torment, so basically I've been waiting for the next chapter xD next chapter is Jack's POV, and then in chapter...8? Yes, 8 will be the next one in Rapunzel's. Rapunzel should finally get introduced to Flynn in chapter 8, and then the romantic subplot of those two can take off and Rapunzel will have met her handsome prince, or ruggedly sexy thief. Ugh but this means I can't write Hiccup again until chapter ten D: his emotional torment shall be particularly over-the-top xD well, ALL my emotional torment tends to be, but I'm crafting this to specifically harm and break him. **

* * *

><p>-Hiccup â€œ

I do not want to do this. I definitely do not want to do this. I want to jump on Toothless' back and fly away from here, and never, ever look back. I don't want to accept the existence of these people and the Boogeyman, and I don't want to go with the Guardians and the other three on some mission to collect_ teeth_. For one thing, that is beyond gross, and for another, I'm still not entirely ready to accept this world yet.

I could fly away from this now. Even if the Guardians want me to accept their protection, they never said they'd make me. And nobody

can outfly a Night Fury. But something roots me to the spot. I keep standing there, even though my chance to run screaming from this new and crazy world is steadily slipping away. As everyone in the group appraises each other, I think I know what it is that's keeping me here. My stupid conscience. Most Vikings don't even have a conscience, or register when they do something morally wrong. But I can't just abandon everyone, not after how upset Tooth looked about her fairiesâ€|and the threat of Pitch Black must be badâ€|and these people are actually worried about me. They actually want to protect me. The only person in the world who has ever expressed concern for my wellbeing before these people is Toothless. But theyâ€|they want to help me, too.

Sometimes Jack says stuff to me as we're flying up above Merida and Rapunzel, way up in the sky. He shouts over the roaring of the wind to be heard, and the one thing I remember about this was the time he called us a team. At the time, I'd reacted kind of badly, because getting attached to these people had been a bad idea. At the time. But now I see what he's saying, and it's sort of true. If I ever tried to fly away from these people, it just wouldn't feel right. And more than that, I would never forget the time I spent with them, even if it was only a week or so.

I come back to earth to realize that Tooth is staring at me with a thoughtful look on her face, and Merida's hand is slowly but surely traveling downward to her quiver. North is watching this uneasily, as is Bunny, but Jack has eyes for nobody but Rapunzel. Sandy is floating closer to Toothless than he was before, but he's not doing the dragon any harm, he's just looking between the rest of us.

"Alright," North relents at last, as Merida's slim fingers find another arrow. "Alright, you can come with."

"North," Tooth is instantly fluttering in front of him, stopping the man from going any farther. "Are you sure we should be doing this? It could be dangerous."

"Dangerous?" The Russian Guardian snorts a little, waving his sword dismissively at her. "Not to worry, Toothy. Children will be kept safe." He gestures at me, Merida and Rapunzel.

"I'm not a child," Merida and I say, in almost perfect unison.

Rapunzel has apparently gotten tired of Jack staring at her, because she's turned away from him to talk to us now. "We can come?"

Tooth hesitates. She's clearly not as comfortable with the concept as North is, but North just nods happily. Bunny's ears are twitching, and he appears anxious to get going. Sandy gives us a thumbs-up.

I do not want to do this. But like I said, I can't just fly away from this anymore. So I reluctantly ready myself to join them for the most bizarre night I have ever had.

North starts us off somewhere pretty cold, and relatively close to the North Pole. For a minute or two, things are actually pretty calm; he dives down several chimneys and emerges with gleaming teeth in each hand, laughing loudly as he does so. Tooth and Jack choose to

fly in through the windows instead, and Bunny uses rabbit holes, while Sandy just floats in on a cloud of his golden sand.

For the girls, there's a bit more of a problem. Rapunzel and Merida can't fly, and while Rapunzel's hair might be good for swinging from tree to tree, it'd be a lot of work for her to use that method, and the only reason she's here is because she wants to know who she is (which I still can't figure out what Tooth told her that could possibly have made her have such an intense identity crisis). And Merida has absolutely no means of transportation through air. So I situate her on Toothless' back, behind me, and Jack holds Rapunzel's hand to guide her through the air and pushes open children's bedroom windows to grab their teeth.

I thought it wouldn't be a big deal to have somebody riding Toothless with me, but every little shift of the body behind me makes me jump, and then I get distracted. It's not even Merida that's distracting me â€" not that she's not pretty enough to distract a guy, because she is, she is, she's just not my type, I assure you â€" it's just the feel of somebody else with me in the saddle. Once, when Toothless takes too sharp a turn, Merida lets out a scream of delight, but slides her arms around my waist nonetheless, to lock herself in.

It reminds me of that one night where everything that I thought was impossible proved to be possible, the night where I slowly introduced one aspect of the world I came from and the world to which I truly belonged, the night in which Astrid was behind me, her arms around me, her head against my shoulder, and where Toothless was solidly beside me, and everything actually felt okay for two seconds. I'd had hope that night. And then it had all gone wrongâ€|

"Are you guys gonna keep up or what?" Jack emerged from a child's house, holding a practically empty red sack in his free hand. Rapunzel held one, too, I noticed. "The score's tied, you guys are gonna lose if you don't get your butts in gear!"

"The score?"

"It's a race!" North informs me cheerfully, hopping down one chimney and then instantly popping out of another, which is a little creepy. "This is going to beâ€|epic!"

"A race?" I duck beneath one of Sandy's whips of Dreamsand â€" he's yanking a tooth from North's grasp. "Are you serious right now, collecting teeth isn't enough, we have to turn it into a contest, too?"

"Oh! Oh!" Merida's breath is hot on my ear, making me twitch a little. I try to scoot up in the saddle, hoping she won't notice. She points downward, to one of the houses that the Guardians haven't covered yet. "C'mon, c'mon, let's get that one, we have to catch up!"

"This isn't a competition!" Still, I lower Toothless until we're right beside the window and Merida hops out onto the ledge, completely fearless. She would have made an incredible Viking. She pushes open the glass, and I watch her as she walks unsteadily across the carpet, reaching under the sleeping boy's pillow and grasping a tooth.

Clearly, she's not perturbed by the blood and gums, because she comes running back over to me, holding the tooth up proudly. "I got one!"

"Congratulations!" North shouts warmly from his chimney. "Here!" He tosses her another empty red sack and she catches it in midair, grabbing it and stuffing her tooth into it.

"Hiccup!" the jolly man adds as we're flying right next to the rooftop he's currently on. He pauses at the chimney and hands me a similar sack. "Aren't you going to join in the race?"

"Is this what you guys do every day?" I avoid the question, steering Toothless just a little closer to the rooftop. We can't stay here long, because the winds are so strong that they're bothering even Toothless.

North laughs. "I wish it were so! Still, you're not going to join competition?" He frowns, looking a little perturbed by that. I think Merida is itching to go to another house now, because she keeps shifting restlessly in the saddle behind me. I edge us forward just a little bit.

"Competitionsâ€¦" I pause, struggling to find the right words. "Aren't really my thing. I can keep score. I'm good at that." I guess my words sound gloomier than I meant them to, because North frowns for a second, his cheerful smile disappearing. And then he shrugs nonchalantly, steps onto the chimney's edge, and shouts, "Well, you would probably lose to me anyway!" And then he's off.

He was probably just saying that to get me, but I can't resist a small smile as I finally pull away from the rooftop and toward the window of another house. As Merida pushes open the window and disappears inside, I open the small red sack he gave me. What, are we going to all count the teeth after we're done? I should still want to fly away from this madness, but I don't.

Actuallyâ€¦I look to where North was last, and my tiny smile grows bigger. The first time I've smiled in a long time. Merida clambers back over to the window, her hair a mess. If it's a competition he wants, then he's got a competition.

7. Chapter 7

****I Don't Want to Talk About It****

****A/N: Horrible chapter ending. Shush. I don't know where the story's going now, but at least Flynn is coming in. Punzie's coming next, so that should be fun. I love writing in her POV. ****

* * *

><p>- Jack â€"

I had no idea Toothless could move that fast!

One second, Hiccup's angling his dragon closer to a rooftop to talk to North, and the next he and Merida are zipping around at the speed of light, wearing identical, mischievous grins on their faces. Still,

it's good to see Hiccup loosening up and having fun, even though I'm ninety percent sure he's gotten more teeth in the last ten seconds than I have all night. I rattle my own red bag of teeth a little, struggling to remember how many are in there. I didn't exactly keep count, see, but if I had to guess, I'd say there are about twenty or thirty in the bag.

I'm also pretty sure Bunny has more than that, too, and I can just about stand losing to Hiccup, but losing to Peter Cottontail at the same time is too much. I turn my eyes to the open sea, waves crashing hard against the rocks, a new horizon spreading out before me. All I want is to zoom off and explore it, collect teeth there, but Rapunzel is currently flying with me. I'm unused to having a passenger, and I turn to her, the question on my lips.

She doesn't need me to ask it; she's got her eyes on the same area, and when I look at her she just smiles and nods enthusiastically, bobbing her head so hard that her hair tumbles down ever farther below us, dangling a bit above the street like a huge golden flag. I wonder what the people down there think of us, if they can even see Rapunzel right now, being held up by nothing but air.

When we're out over the open ocean, Rapunzel starts giggling. I mean, for no reason at all. It's not like either one of us is saying something funny, or even talking at all. We're just flying in silence. So I give her a kind of strange look, and she's instantly sobering again, but a smile lingers on her lips, making her big green eyes sparkle. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, it's justâ€¦it's a lot of fun. Tonight, I mean. It's been a lot of fun. Thank you."

"It'll be even more fun when we see the look on Bunny's face when he realizes we've beaten him," I tell her, and this makes her laugh again, which makes me grin in delight. I've already come to know her as anxious and scared, so making her laugh is rare. And even rarer with what happened todayâ€¦

My brows draw down at the memory, and I give her hand a squeeze. "Are you okay?"

"Yes!" She nods delightedly, her hair bobbing again. "Yes, of course. Why?"

"Uhâ€¦" I hesitate for a second, wondering if I should remind her. She must see the answer in my face, because her expression changes. Instantly, she's closed off, turning away from me as if to physically represent the sudden distance between us, when before she was so happy. I wish I had never brought it up.

I want to cheer her up again, but I don't think a snowball fight is the way to go, especially not in midair, so we fly in silence for a bit until a voice breaks us out of our separate reveries. "Not trying to get away from us, are you?"

I glance up, startled, instantly deflating again when I realize it's only Hiccup, looking maddeningly smug as Toothless swoops over us.

I muster up the scariest glare I can, clenching my hand tighter around my staff. "Go away. This is our turf."

"Make us," Merida replies, saving Hiccup the trouble. "'Sides, Frost,

don't get your staff in a knot. What on earth makes you think we actually want to fly with you, anyway?"

Just Merida's tone of voice makes me feel stupid, and as heat rises to my cheeks, I struggle to think of a good comeback. "Let me guess â€" you're coming here to brag?"

"Wellâ€" Hiccup sing-songs, swerving suddenly so he's flying upside down, gripping Toothless with one hand and dangling the other out in front of us, clenched in a fist and clutching a red sack clearly full of teeth. "I wouldn't say bragging, exactly, but there you are."

I make a wild grab for him, maybe to punch or freeze him or pull him out of the saddle, but whatever I was planning to do, I can't now because he's gone again, swooping upward. For a moment, he disappears into the black sky, and then, just as I begin getting concerned that I accidentally caught him and did freeze his arm or something â€" and the weird fog settling in all around us is not helping â€" he appears again, grinning.

"I bet I've got more than you!" I call up to him, even though I don't bet this at all â€" I just want to wipe the cocky smirk off his face.

"If you did, you'd be showing them off by now!"

"Can you two please cut it out for a second?" Merida sounds annoyed. "I can hardly get a shoofie through this fog!"

"It is a bit strange," Rapunzel admits, "it just seemed to come up out of nowhere."

"We could turn back, if it gets too thick," Hiccup suggests.

"Nah, Bunny was nearly catching up to me when I left. I at least need to get a look around and see if there's any kids here he hasn't already gotten to."

"You're risking flying into fog andâ€"

"Hey, look, there's land!"

"What? Where?"

"I can't see anything!"

"Shut up, maybe your mouth's creating a wind tunnel and preventing you!"

"I know you didn't just say that! Hiccup! Give me back my bow, I gotta teach that scunner a _lesson_â€"

"Shut up!" When the fog clears enough, I see that Hiccup has actually clamped a hand over Merida's mouth to prevent her from speaking, and with his other hand, he's clutching her bow, a safe distance away from her hands.

He slowly releases her, letting her bow slide out of his grip. "Iâ€" I thought I heard something," he says, obviously disconcerted. "It wasâ€"it was coming from up aheadâ€"

When I squint into the fog, I see the land I glimpsed earlier: a great curving, conical structure, a mountain peak gone wrong, turning nearly inward upon itself, mist still obscuring the very top.

I can finally hear what Hiccup was hearing: a great howling din, as though a thousand wolves are below us. It's not coming from the island in front of us, though; it's coming from somewhere to the east. I tilt my head, beginning to swoop down to hear better before Rapunzel startles me back into reality. "Jack!"

"What?" I spin around in midair, glancing up at her. Like I said, I keep forgetting I have someone else with me; I'm so used to being alone, it's just natural for me to go wherever I want to without thinking of her. I slowly ease up again, cutting my eyes to the ocean. I can still hear the howling. "Sorry."

"It's okay. I justâ€¦I don't want to go down there. I don't want you going down there. Something's off about that place."

"Right." I nod a little, but as I turn to go back, I see Hiccup is frozen in place. Toothless seems to have registered his rider's feelings, because he's not going anywhere, just hovering, glancing up at Hiccup every now and then, waiting for the boy to decide where he wants to go.

"Hiccup." Rapunzel puts a hand on his shoulder. "C'mon, let's go."

"Yeah, that howling is creeping me out," Merida replies frankly.

I can see Hiccup, can see him leaning forward in Toothless' saddle, tilting his head to hear those howls, and there's this look of longing in his eyes, like he's hearing everything he wants to hear with that howling. He seems barely aware of his actions, but he's drawing closer and closer to the island directly in front of us, not the one with the howling. The island in front of us is dead quiet.

"Hiccup." Rapunzel's voice becomes harder, firmer, her grip on his shoulder tight. "Please come away with us â€" I don't like that howling."

Hiccup's mouth opens, but no sound comes out â€" it's like he's forgotten how to speak. I start to get worried for a second, but just as suddenly, Hiccup slams down on the pedals controlling Toothless' tailfin, and he's turned around, riding faster even than he did while collecting teeth. He's flying away from us. Rapunzel and I exchange glances, and she gives me a helpless shrug.

I wonder what more could possibly top off this crazy day of apparently being chosen for Guardianship (as if), being told I was once a human, (because Man in the Moon couldn't possibly have dropped by and mentioned that before all the teeth were stolen) and now Hiccup just flying away from us. When I catch up to him again, I'm surprised to see him, rigid in the saddle, sitting very upright on Toothless' back, his movements robotic and jerky as he flies away.

I angle myself closer, surprised to hear Rapunzel's squeak of surprise. Whoops, I forgot her again. I turn back to check if she's

okay, but she seems fine, so I give Hiccup a gentle swat on the head to get his attention. "You okay?"

"Yes." Even his voice, his tone, sounds jerky and emotionless, his fingers shaking as he fiddles with the numerous buckles and clasps on his dragon's saddle. "Yes, I'm fine."

"Why did youâ€"

"I don't want to talk about it, Jack." He cuts through my words as easily as a knife through butter, and he doesn't sound emotionless anymore; his tone is very obviously colored with anger. He speeds up again, as if he thinks he can outfly me or something. Nonetheless, it's clear the guy's pissed, so I decide to give him his space. But when I pull back to let him do just that, Rapunzel gives me this look, like I'm being a horrible friend or something.

"What?"

"Talk to him," she mouths.

"Why?" I drop my voice to a whisper, even though, with the wind whipping in our ears and stealing our words, it's impossible for Hiccup to hear us from this distance, anyway.

"Because he's upset, and he needs someone to talk to!"

"He just told me he didn't want to talk about it."

"That's code for 'yes, I do'."

"Okay, look, Punzie, maybe it works that way with girls, but when I say I don't want to talk about something, I mean it."

She gives a little sigh, like she thinks saying something and actually meaning it is dumb. I feel more than ever like I need my space right now, but with Punzie clinging to my hand, depending on me to keep her in the air, I can't have that. The wind blows back my hair, calming me, soothing me. It's the only thing that can right now.

End
file.